

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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SenatorBenCardin



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Dear Fellow Marylander:

What is infrastructure? There has been a good deal of talk lately about rebuilding our infrastructure in Maryland and across the country. It's an integral part of what I'm doing on Capitol Hill lately. As we get deep into the debate about what parts of our infrastructure to prioritize, it is important that we all start with the same understanding of what infrastructure is and why it is so vital to everything that everyone in our country does every day.

At its core, infrastructure is the physical foundations and the day-to-day needs of homes, businesses large and small, schools, restaurants, fun places to visit and more. The buildings, water, electricity, broadband, as well as the roads, ports and airports, and/or transit that allow people to access these locations. Infrastructure is all around us all the time.

For more than 20 years, the [American Society of Civil Engineers \(ASCE\)](#) has been issuing report cards on America's aging infrastructure. As a nation, our grades have been fairly pathetic. The most recent report card, which was released earlier this year, showed an overall grade of C-. The needs in Maryland and every state are widespread. In Baltimore, I have seen pipes that are over [100 years old](#). It's no wonder the ASCE reports that "there is a water main break every two minutes and an estimated 6 billion gallons of treated water lost each day in the U.S., enough to fill over 9,000 swimming pools." In addition, "43% of our public roadways in poor or mediocre condition."

The Biden-Harris administration's [American Jobs Plan](#) is a massively bold proposal that will address the growing and urgent needs of our country's infrastructure and move the country forward for decades. It contains multiple landmark measures that create millions of well-paying jobs, while dealing head-on with vexing national challenges like climate change and aging infrastructure. It directs significant investments to the things that make our everyday lives safer, cleaner and more efficient, and it addresses persistent gaps in broadband connectivity that will make major differences in many of Maryland's urban and rural communities.

The American Jobs Plan shows what happens when you think big, and Maryland has several huge highway, bridge and rail tunnel priority projects that will only be possible to accomplish with this kind of national investment.

Beyond preventing yet another water main break, the American Jobs Plan will take major steps to ensure clean, safe drinking water is a right in all communities, including an investment of more than \$100 billion to replace 100 percent of the nation's lead pipes and service lines. According to the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC), there is no safe level of lead exposure for children, and yet many of Baltimore City schools are served by lead pipes. We cannot understate the importance of striving to remove every lead pipe in Baltimore, our entire state, and the nation.

The Biden-Harris plan recognizes that providing safe environments for our children to learn and grow is a critical piece of infrastructure reform. The package includes \$25 billion to establish a Child Care Growth and Innovation Fund that will provide funding for the renovation and construction of childcare centers across the United States. The plan also includes \$100 billion for school infrastructure, which will help accelerate the rebuilding of Maryland's schools, so that every child's classroom has heat and air conditioning.

Among the many housing components, the plan also includes the [Neighborhood Homes Investment Act](#), which I authored with Senator Rob Portman to build or rehabilitate more than a half-million homes for low- and middle-income homebuyers in distressed neighborhoods in Maryland and across the country. This bipartisan provision will create new pathways for more families to buy a home and to start building wealth.

All forms of transportation constitute infrastructure and I am excited about how the Biden-Harris plan emphasizes expanding mass transit and alternative forms of transportation, alongside fixing highways, rebuilding bridges, improving railways, upgrading ports, and modernizing airports. This multi-faceted effort also contains clear blueprints for renewing our outdated utilities, such as the electrical grid and expanding the use of renewable energy sources.

No comprehensive approach to our national priorities can be complete without an improved national strategy for addressing the impacts of climate change. The American Jobs Plan decisively moves our country in the proper direction on addressing this growing threat. This is an especially important in Maryland, where our economy and recreational opportunities are so closely tied to our nation's largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay. Every day the habitats within the Bay watershed face a siege of stressors from climate change.

[Building back our national infrastructure](#) better than ever before is an acute national imperative. When the electricity stops, businesses shutter and the lights go out in schools. When pipes burst because they are old and brittle, roads become rivers of dirty water and restaurants close. These problems were building before the COVID-19 pandemic. They have only worsened as local and state governments have seen revenues plummet and pandemic-related expenses mushroom.

Congress has an historic opportunity to rebuild our nation from the ground up while fueling job-growth at a low-point in our economy. Small measures will not get the job done. We need big, bold and bipartisan.

As Chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, I will be active in the drive to turn this bold package into law. I intend to work with my Democratic and Republican colleagues to shape this legislation. In the end, we will use whatever means possible to get this over the finish line.

Partisan gridlock will not salvage America's infrastructure or our economy. We must use this moment to act decisively.

Thank you for your attention and thank you to all those who reply each week to my letters. I appreciate your thoughts on the issues facing Maryland and our country.

Stay well. Please wear a mask.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Ben Cardin